

## **“THE WOMEN OF TROY WARNS THAT EVEN THE GREATEST OF INDIVIDUALS CAN BE BROUGHT LOW.” TO WHAT EXTENT DO YOU AGREE.**

Universal suffering and loss is the consequence all involved with war face. This is the ultimate point that Euripides strives to display in his tragedy, *The Women of Troy*. Performed to an audience of Athenian men in 415BC, a year on from the aftermath of the atrocities of Melos, Euripides' play is carefully constructed and an anti-war message embedded, in order to warn the Athenian audience of the dangers of waging war. The destruction of Troy, and the lamentation of the death of its king and greatest hero, forcefully portrays Euripides' message that no-one can be certain of the reaction of those in power during war.

Furthermore, it is the plight of the surviving women that proves war is not only a risk for men – it also endangers women, exposing them to the most ignominious of fates. Euripides also plays upon the fate of the Greeks at the discretion of the Gods, which looms ever-present in the play, warning that even those who are victorious in battle cannot be certain when their luck is up, with the intended destruction of the Greek fleet alluded to.

Through the laments of the Trojan women and Gods, Euripides depicts explicitly how the once great city of Troy and its leaders have been utterly destroyed. Overt imagery highlights the bloody violence that has occurred, Poseidon mournful that 'the temples are deserted, and puddles of blood smear the sanctuaries of all gods. King Priam lays dead.' Poseidon's connection to the City of Troy comes in the form of its creation, crafted by Apollo and himself. Poseidon's powerful language shows that he has 'always had a particular love for this city,' however due to the actions of the Greeks, he feels he has 'been defeated.' Poseidon is viewed honourably as the ultimate creationist, and his existence is reduced to a powerless mourner upon the destruction of Troy. Likewise, Cassandra remembers Hector as 'the greatest of men' but notes with sorrow 'now he is gone. Dead.' She asserts that he died 'nobly, with dignity,' because he was defending his home. Although these are the words of Hecubas 'god-crazed daughter', this exclamation further cements that the once great leaders of Troy have been destroyed, as the suffering is not exclusive to the women. Cassandra explains that 'their women died in the loneliness of widowhood, their fathers became childless old men.' The significance of this is that Euripides is able to employ an anti-war message by depicting how the men explicitly involved in war are destroyed, and this has devastating adverse effects on the implicitly involved, namely children and women.

The deaths of the Trojan men leave their wives and daughters exposed to continuing suffering and brutality. The depth of Hecuba's fall from Queen is conveyed through imagery that alludes to the symbols of royal power: she is 'throned in the dust' and wears a 'crown of pain'. The association of this royal power positions the audience with the belief that she has lost collectively more than the other women of Troy, so her words have authority when they are spoken to be representative of the plight of all women involved in the Trojan War. This distinction is made clear when the Chorus question Hecuba, looking upon her to show leadership as the past queen of Troy. "Is there any decision? ... Who'll be the master of my grief?" Hecuba is unable to tell them, the significance of this being that she is no longer a queen and therefore has no command over them, her vast power brought low. Andromache is utilised by Euripides to show that the suffering of war does not escape even the most perfect of individuals, which can be seen when she is tortured with the prospect of being a slave: "I made it my business to be the perfect wife!" Andromache's fate is symbolised by her being "wheeled in on top of a baggage wagon loaded with spoils" with her son Astyanax. She further exclaims that "we are loot, my son and I!" This shows the Greeks objectification of the spoils of war, being the women turned into slaves, and dehumanises their brutality to the audience.

The death of Astyanax is a prime example of the death of Trojan men causing plight for the women of Troy, as it is Astyanax's connection to Hector that "the Generals have decided" should be destroyed, the significance being that Astyanax's suffering continues at the expense of her husband's death. Much of the suffering of the women of Troy can be attributed to the absence of Trojan men after their deaths. Many characters like Andromache and Hecuba suffer immense devastation at the hands of the Greeks consolidating their win in the Trojan War. Euripides highlights that these women have lost the love they shared with their husbands, and the protection of their royal status.

While the total degradation of the Trojan women is played out in front of the audience, looming in the background of the action of the play is the foreshadowed destruction of the Greeks, at the hands of the Gods. Athene makes it her business to "make the Greeks' return home a disaster" because she feels that she has "been insulted, my temple desecrated." The hubris of the Greeks has led them to immoral behaviour. Euripides presents the Gods as fickle and tumultuous, with their own self-interest at heart before the wellbeing of the people of Troy are considered. However, this complex works to position the audience to feel Euripides' disdain for the manner in which the gods treat those who make them what they are; after all, what are the worshipped without worshippers? Euripides implies that the gods are not worth the Trojans' consideration. Euripides uses the known fate of the Greeks to warn his audience that death and destruction can occur at any time during war, particularly when hubris on the Greeks part governs decision making, a war founded over the possessive ownership of Helen. He also emphasises that the gods are contrary in nature – while they may be supportive, they are always capable to a 'cavalier change of mind', as can be seen with Athene. Athene also feigns concern for the defeated Trojans, her "former enemies" claiming that they "will be comforted." An example of her self-absorbed personality can be seen when the audience is made aware that upon making the "Greeks' return home a disaster" the Trojan women aboard the ships will likewise die, the Trojan men are already dead, there will be no one left in the city, so who will be comforted? Only the Gods themselves. The Trojan war creates a persona around the once highly regarded Gods that they have transformed into uncaring deities whose vanity must be regularly appeased. They are seen as independent from humanity, and use their physical existence to carry out their own self-centred wishes.

Through the unending images of death and suffering in his tragedy, Euripides leaves the audience in no doubt that anyone can be brought low, and in the Ancient Trojan society, especially if the Gods will it. In the laments of the women of Troy, Euripides calls upon his Athenian audience to remember that an entire city was brought down because of one woman and the desire men felt for her. As the Trojan women are alerted to the full extent of their fate, their laments turn to their own selves, and poignantly highlight how even the most notable of women are not so safe when they are left without a husband or a father to protect them. Euripides' dramatic rendition of this brief moment in their lives provides a poignant reminder of the fragile humanity of every victim in war, while his allusion to the Gods fickle personality alerts his audience to the fact that those who are victorious in war never know when they too will suffer, like the Greeks upon their return home, or a parallel to the fates of Hecuba and her family.